



DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH  
State of Mississippi

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**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH WANTS  
MISSISSIPPIANS TO BE AWARE OF THE WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS IN  
CHILDREN**

Jackson – When disasters occur, children may witness or learn about these events by watching TV, talking with people at school, or over hearing adults discussing the events. Below are some common reactions that children and adolescents may display.

**Young Children (1-6 years)**

- Helplessness and passivity; lack of usual responsiveness
- Heightened arousal and confusion
- Difficulty talking about event; lack of verbalization
- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Separation fears and clinging to caregivers
- Regressive symptoms (e.g., bedwetting, loss of acquired speech and motor skills)
- Anxieties about death
- Somatic symptoms (e.g., stomach aches, headaches)
- "Freezing" (sudden immobility of body)

**School-aged Children (6-11 years)**

- Feelings of responsibility and guilt
- Repetitious traumatic play and retelling
- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Concerns about safety and preoccupation with danger
- Changes in behavior, mood, and personality
- Somatic symptoms (complaints about bodily aches and pains)
- Withdrawal
- Separation anxiety
- Loss of interest in activities
- Confusion and inadequate understanding of traumatic events (more evident in play than in discussion)



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**Pre-adolescents and Adolescents (12-18 years)**

- Rebellion at home or school
- Abrupt shift in relationships
- Depression and social withdrawal
- Decline in school performance
- Trauma-driven acting out, such as with sexual activity and reckless risk taking
- Excessive activity and involvement with others, or retreat from others in order to manage inner turmoil
- Wish for revenge and action-oriented responses to trauma
- Sleep and eating disturbances, including nightmares

Sometimes people need extra help to deal with a traumatic event. People directly affected by this tragedy, young children, people who have been through other traumatic events, and people with emotional problems are more likely to need professional help.

Project Recovery, a division of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, has been developed to assist people in finding ways to cope with stress caused by Hurricane Katrina. Expressing your feelings about a traumatic event like Katrina is important. Project Recovery provides free crisis counseling services through community outreach, public education and information and referral. There are no medical or financial screening methods to qualify to receive services.

Project Recovery is funded through a grant by the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and facilitated with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The Project Recovery Helpline is accessible 24-hours a day, seven days a week. For assistance, please call 1-866-856-3227.

**Source:** The National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, [www.ncptsd.org](http://www.ncptsd.org)

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